We must find a way to stop Bullies

By RHONDA CROWDER
Staff Reporter

Bullying has reached epidemic levels. Children are committing suicide, some are dropping out of school and others are struggling to find coping mechanisms. It has become the biggest issue children will directly face of our time. Fortunately, more and more prevention efforts are starting to spring up.

We are delighted to present a few.

One mother's reaction:

Jacqueline Kelo, of Rittman, Ohio, wrote a bill to address bullying as a result of the death of her son, Feb. 23, 2011. Because the case is still open and under investigation, she cannot provide details surrounding his death but could say she came home to find him on the living floor with a gunshot to the head.

She said her son, Nicholas Kelo, 13, was in the eighth grade. Because he was a gifted and talented child with an IQ of 152 he had been moved up a grade. He was involved in many activities including football, martial arts, and marching band. He was even a second degree black belt in Tae Kwon Do. Some of the activities he participated in included students much older than he was.

"This was a kid who had plans," said Kelo. Nicholas wanted to be an engineer.

His mother said he had been experiencing bullying since the first grade. It generally stemmed around him being smaller, younger, and talented. Basically, some of the other children were jealous of him.

"He was very smart," she said.

When he was younger, he and his mother talked about the bullying much more. As he grew older, he withdrew from discussing it with her. After a while, he stopped providing names and details.

Trained to be a peacemaker, Nicholas thought he could handle it, but eventually realized that he couldn't reason with these people, couldn't settle it through dialogue. He knew he could settle with martial arts but refuse to use it. His mother started to see an escalation in his frustrations.

Nicholas was her only child and best friend.

Nicholas's death was the fourth bullying related death in Rittman in four years. Another death occurred after his. Kelo blames the school. And, their lack of due diligence led her to write "The Kelo Act," which outlines processes and procedures for documenting bullying.

"If this reporting procedure was in place, it would have sent a red flag to [Ohio Department of Education]," said Kelo.

Even after her son's death, she didn't think the school took any proactive measures to prevent bullying.

She said New Jersey and Florida have the toughest bullying laws. Ohio needs to follow suit. "Had they done anything at all, after the first three deaths, my son would still be here," she continued.

"We are trying to hold school officials accountable for the safety of kids."

Voices for Ohio's Children, who held a bullying forum earlier this year, in conjunction with MyCom and Cleveland Metropolitan School District, is helping Kelo work on the legislation. They are providing a cost analysis and preparing to make presentations.

Unfortunately, she's been unable to find a legislator to introduce the bill. She did receive one offer, but they wanted to water down the language and remove a key piece of verbiage that would have the biggest impact, creating what she calls, "symbolic legislation."

"I didn't want my son's name attached to something that won't protect children," said Kelo.

To learn about Jacqueline Kelo's efforts visit www.keloskids.com

One school principal's response:

Dr. Terrance E. Menefee, a pre-K through 8th grade principal and adjunct college professor, sees his fair share of bullying and its effects on children over his 20 plus years in education. With that, he began to craft a story to provide tactical solutions.

His book, "The Adventures of DJ Spoon and Missy: The Bully Stops," is an illustrated novel about a teenage disc jockey (Spoon), his side-kick Rottweiler Missy, and his magical turntables One and Two who travels through various communities across the country to help children solve problems a positive way.

In his first adventure, "The Bullying Stops," DJ Spoon brings a musically inspired end to the Cyber-bullying that the Dime Divas of John Harvard Junior High are perpetrating against Spoon's friend, Anna.

Being able to witness this problem first hand, Menefee provided his perspective as to why bullying exists.

"I see a lot of kids wanting to gain power over other kids. A lot of it has to do with control," said Menefee.

Menefee says that although bullying is an old problem, the advent of cyber-bullying has caused it to escalate.

It's prevalent in both urban and suburban communities, the difference lies within our members of those communities respond.

He feels the way we choose to deal with it in a progressive society is the challenge adult's face.

"I think communication with parent and kid is important. We also need schools to adopt anti-bullying policies and enforce them." Menefee also recommends sensitivity training.

"I think there's no one silver bully but, as a society, if we choose to combat, we can gain control of it," he said.

"The Adventures of DJ Spoon and Missy: The Bullying Stops" is available for purchase at www.amazon.com, www.drterrancemenefee.com, and www.intelligentpublishing.com.

One actor's response:

Speaking of musical inspired ways to end bullying, Tray Charles, better known as Poot from the HBO hit series, "The Wire," is showcasing his rap skills in a video created to bring awareness to bullying. The video, "Mike Bully: Stand up for our Future," is about a young boy growing up in a single parent home. His mother is struggling to make ends meet. She's unable to buy him the latest clothes. However, he excels in school.

With that, the other children tease him until the story takes an interesting turn to present solutions.

To watch to the video visit www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTecq9aqB1Y